An Interview with William Seale

William Seale (Courtesy of the White House Historical Association)

William Seale is an independent historian who specializes in the restoration of historic houses. He was born in Beaumont, Texas, and received his B.A. from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, and Ph.D. from Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. For the past three decades, Seale has been involved in the restoration of historic buildings across the nation, specializing in state capitols and other public buildings, including opera houses, courthouses, historic homes, and museum village buildings. His recent historic house projects include the George C. Marshall House in Leesburg, Virginia; Ten Chimneys near Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Rosedown Plantation in St. Francisville, Louisiana. Antoinette J. Lee (AJL), CRM Journal editor, interviewed Seale at his Alexandria, Virginia, home on March 3, 2004.

AJL: How did you become interested in historic houses?

WS: I think it's because my father, a contractor when I was very young, built new houses. I grew up around this. The smell of construction still excites me. He was interested in historic building practices and lamented the short-cuts of new construction, one reason he ultimately left the field. We would walk around town, look at houses, and discuss them. My mother had an eye for interiors and could easily date furnishings in them. We had friends in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, where the architecture is very good, and we used to visit them in the summer. I started going there by myself after I could drive, and at the same time, toured all over Louisiana. I still have a fondness for Louisiana buildings and that French touch. Back then, the Louisiana communities were not the red-hot tourist attractions that they are today.

Where we lived in Texas, the Louisiana border was only about 25 miles away. When I was growing up, "town" for us was New Orleans. We traveled there several times a year and bought school clothes and other essentials. Odd as it may seem, Houston was fairly unknown to me. A freeway changed that in the late 1950s. When we visited West Feliciana Parish, we admired the houses of our friends' many relatives. Few of the houses had undergone much change for many years—there simply was no money and that was surely their salvation. I remember one in particular, Rosedown Plantation, for which all these years later I have drawn up a furnishings master plan. There was Afton Villa, Greenwood, both since burned, and Oakley, where John James Audubon was the tutor, and which in the late 1940s was being restored with convict labor.

So, when I was young, I was exposed to lots of buildings. I traveled to Natchez, Mississippi, from time to time and old towns in East Texas. Several summers, I went with my family to New Mexico where we visited relatives who had working ranches at Ocote and Magdalena. I was rather turned loose in Santa Fe, Taos, and Las Vegas. When I went to college at Southwestern University in central Texas, I was interested in architecture, but not in taking architectural courses. From that perch, I traveled in western and southern Texas and often to northern Mexico. I settled on a history major and cultivated an interest in historic architecture on my own. I never have stopped studying it, although my approach is not orthodox. History as taught in colleges and universities was entirely political history. Some of our professors were Germans who had survived or fled ahead of the Holocaust—dramatic lecturers and dedicated scholars, utterly devoted to their work.

My ambition then was to teach history at a small college. After I received my Ph.D. degree from Duke University, I taught at Lamar University in Texas, and published two books on Texas history—*Texas Riverman: The Life and Times of Captain Andrew Smyth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966) and *Sam Houston's Wife: A Biography of Margaret Lea Houston* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970). *Sam Houston's Wife* is still out there in paperback. In the early and mid-1960s, someone with a history Ph.D. had many choices. However, by the late 1960s, the academic world changed in terms of tenure, public support for history teaching, and committee workloads. Things became tense and quite different. I quit full-time teaching in 1969.

AJL: How did you decide on historic preservation as a career?

WS: Just before I completed my dissertation, I attended the Seminar for Historical Administrators in Williamsburg, Virginia, in the summer of 1964, where I met many people in the field, including William J. Murtagh, the seminar's leader. Bill was an inspiring teacher. The seminar altered my career direction by making me realize that I could redirect my history work towards buildings and interiors in one form or another.

In 1970, an alternative to teaching presented itself. My first job in preservation was a dual responsibility as director of the South Carolina Tricentennial celebration in Columbia and director of the Historic Columbia Foundation. There were three Tricentennial centers in the state—in Columbia, Greenville, and Charleston. I developed a historical center in Columbia, worked on the restoration of the Hampton-Preston House, and taught on an adjunct basis at the University of South Carolina. For the Historic Columbia Foundation, I continued work underway in a wonderful Robert Mills house of 1820 and opened Woodrow Wilson's 1872 boyhood home. During the summers in 1971 and 1972, I served as coordinator for the Seminar for Historical Administration in Williamsburg, as the seminar was renamed.

In 1971, I became associated with writing a history of the state capitols, a project that the Victorian Society in American sponsored and that received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The project required someone who had been in the academic world and who had published to partner with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, the architectural historian, who was the principal investigator of this project. I became associate investigator. The two of us went to the project with entirely different approaches, but discovered that the details of the state capitols mingled history—human history—and architectural history compellingly. We decided not to do the expected picture book, but rather to write the history of a building type. Through this project, I became very interested in public buildings.

At the project's outset, I was impressed by the sheer size of the project: 50 state capitols. I had planned to do most of the leg-work. However, Professor Hitchcock became so interested that he went to about half of them himself. How he loved to travel! Between the two of us, we visited all state capitols—some I should say twice because I went to all of them. The book was published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1976 as *Temples of Democracy*.

At that time, several state capitols were threatened with demolition and replacement, including most notably Michigan's capitol. Public opinion and the 1976 Bicentennial were to change this situation. A wave of capitol restorations rose later on and continues even now, with Kansas and Utah both underway. I have worked on the restoration of seven state capitols over probably 25 years, and have consulted on more.

I just returned from a very interesting trip to Alaska, where I conferred with a group of citizens and officials about building a permanent state capitol at Juneau. Up to this point, Alaska has used a fine old federal building built about 1929. It is a good structure immaculately cared for. However, now Alaska wants a symbolic capitol, and it is certainly time. It is the only state without a permanent capitol building. Juneau, the historic seat of government, is the prime contender, and an incredibly beautiful site it is.

AJL: Tell us when you started to work on historic house restorations.

WS: You mean on my own. I started consulting on historic house restorations in 1972 beginning with the 1840 Greek Revival house, Bulloch Hall, in Roswell, Georgia. Bulloch Hall was the childhood home of Mittie Bulloch Roosevelt, President Theodore Roosevelt's mother. She married Mr. Roosevelt in the house. It is a fine wooden house straight out of the pattern books—with a touch of Georgia whimsy in the proportions.

AJL: Do you have a philosophy about approaching a historic house restoration?

WS: If historic houses are going to be museums, their interpretive history must be based on solid historical information that comes from research. Research must be completed and analyzed before the building is ever touched, even before the important physical research gets underway. If the historic house is a private house, the result will be much more interesting if the aura and feel of the actual past of the place are there. Most people restore too fast. But it is hard to fault private owners creating a home. Provided that they are not destroying the building itself, they can do pretty much what they wish. Sometimes, of course, the results are regrettable. But with a museum house, fast work leads to mistakes for which there are no excuses. This is amateurish and intolerable.

AJL: When *The Tasteful Interlude* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1975), your book on Victorian interiors, was first published, was it a revelation that a great deal of historical documentation is available for interior restorations and decisions need not be based simply on taste?

If the historic house is a private house, the result will be much more interesting if the aura and feel of the actual past of the place are there. Most people restore too fast. … But with a museum house, fast work leads to mistakes for which there are no excuses.

WS: At that time, very little substantive historical research was being carried out on historic buildings. The National Park Service came the closest to achieving standards in this kind of work. Even then, often a political historian, without another involvement or facet to their interest, did the research on historic buildings. He could produce a whole history and barely mention the building. It was a history, yes, but not one of much use in restoring the building. Such a product is, in that context, a waste of time. For example, what could an academic biography of James Madison have to say that would help to restore Montpelier?

Prior to the early 1970s, most restorations were based on principles that came from art history, or the trade of interior design, where "period" design is mistaken for historical fact. Then there were—and are—the architects whose training in modern architectural design and technique is usually a strongly negative influence. And equally dangerous are those whose backgrounds in architectural history give them a tendency to want to make everything architecturally perfect or classic, if you will. Fiske Kimball was that sort of restorer. We still see this today.

The 1970s marked a new phase in historic house restorations. My purpose in *The Tasteful Interlude* and a later book, *Recreating the Historic House Interior* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1979), was to describe a different way of looking at interiors and finally a different

restoration process, addressing research, evaluating information and conjecture according to the building, not just the characters. Bringing all the sources together—including the physical tracks—in terms of the building is always a real eye-opener. You see it as you have never been able to see it before. Of course, you will face conjecture. This is perfectly all right if your solutions are based on real knowledge of the time and place and possibilities—this is part of the usual work of historians.

AJL: Most of the houses you have worked on have a great deal of written documentation, more than might be available for vernacular houses where you might have no written records.

WS: Vernacular buildings themselves can be read physically. Surrounding documentation can be extensive, if you look for it. Sometimes the written record turns up in strange places. For example, for the furnishings master plan I did for Rosedown, there was a treasure trove of documentation absolutely untouched in the clerk's office in the Parish Courthouse—strangely overlooked for a place so famous. Probate records turned up inventories and information on furniture, store accounts, even very dramatic family events. Rosedown had been restored for 40 years and these documents had never been examined. No one looked. Virtually every house has written information somewhere that is associated with it. For one thing, unless maybe for a house-trailer, it stands on property someone owned. If written documentation is not available, you do have to go to the nearest documentation you have and compare it with houses in other places. The unfortunate, more usual case is like Rosedown; most times the factual material is simply overlooked, if looked for in a serious way at all.

AJL: With advances in interest in how everyday people lived and the amount of research that is invested in it, and all the books produced, why don't people regard restorations as requiring the kind of research that one puts into a book?

WS: In a nutshell: people get too much money and get itchy fingers. You know, fixing up an old house is fun! Yet, people here and there are achieving a high level of specific research tailored to buildings. For example, under the leadership of Graham Hood, Colonial Williamsburg became a model in the 1970s and 1980s for research and informed restorations. Hood studied English precedents and applied them to the buildings of Williamsburg on the premise that the influence from across the ocean was still great in the late colonial period. He was constantly looking there for documentation. What he did in changing the museum buildings to reflect how they were lived in originally rather than as decorative arts settings certainly did not please everyone. The public in general, I think, was fascinated. It made people ask questions about history. Turning Williamsburg from a *monument* to a historical essay could only have been controversial. The same approach was already appearing elsewhere especially with younger scholars. But you still see decorative arts settings passed off as historically accurate.

The scientific aspects of restoration have advanced in everything from structural analysis to drapery-making. Today, there are skilled people in all of the many fields associated with restoration, if not crowds of them. Previously, that kind of detail—how it was done—did not matter as much as how it looked.

AJL: Do you prefer working on a house museum over a private home?

WS: In a word, yes. I have worked on private homes, but I more enjoy historic house museums where historical authenticity is paramount. Private homes are not the same thing. There are so many compromises, adapting a place where you live to a lifestyle wholly different from what the house was created to serve. You have your own ideas. A gifted decorator can give a private home restoration a spark, but their vocabulary is that of the marketplace and not of history. In this, they are not really different from most architects, who do not know the difference between a rehabilitation and a restoration. A proper restoration does not begin as a design problem.

Like any history, restoration philosophy grows from questioning. There are many details, one can find out about how people lived in a house. These details enrich interpretation. I recall that my father, who was born in 1882, used to describe being in an old house that my wife and I now have in East Texas, in the summertime when he was a child. The mosquitoes were bad. Everyone was afraid of yellow fever. He said that the beds had high posts to support curtains in winter and in summer mosquito netting. Once you went to bed, the mosquito bar was tucked in all around the edge of the mattress. You lay on a feather bed and were not allowed to move. It was hot and the windows were open. Smudge pots kept going all night on high sticks puffed black smoke in and out of the windows to drive away the mosquitoes. It was uncomfortable, but it beat getting yellow fever or malaria. I found a stereoview of an old house somewhere and what did it have sticking around the outside on poles? Smudge pots! I'd never have known that had he not told me the story. Some might consider such details trivia but resurrected in a historic building they help kindle the historical imagination.

AJL: What were some of the most challenging house restorations you worked on?

WS: One of the most interesting in recent years was Ten Chimneys in Genesee Depot, near Milwaukee, a house that the Broadway stars Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne built—mainly he created beginning at age 19 before he married her at 22 (she was 30). You know, Lunt and Fontanne dominated the theater on Broadway and in London from the mid-1920s to the late 1950s. In the early 1930s, well-established already in their longstanding fame, the Lunts made Ten Chimneys what it is today. After Lynne Fontanne's death in 1980, the property sat unused for years but nothing was removed. By 1996, commercial development threatened to destroy the house. A very imaginative man, Joseph

W. Garton, a restaurateur, theater historian, and arts advocate, led a campaign to save the property.

The design of the 14-room house was quirky enough, a stage set—or series of sets—as much as a home. It had fine woodwork, murals, decorative works, furnishings, and chandeliers put together in intricate room-settings. Everything was still in the house and in place down to personal effects. Photographs of the Lunts in residence in the 1930s showed that nothing had changed. As the brochure from Ten Chimneys states, "Ten Chimneys is overflowing with memorabilia: notes from Laurence Olivier, snapshots of the Lunts with the Queen Mother and Charlie Chaplin, mementos from Helen Hayes and Noël Coward, inscribed first edition books from Edna Ferber and Alexander Woollcott, and remembrances from dozens of other intimates and luminaries."

Joe Garton bought the farm and, after an investigation of historic houses in general, called me. I spent a lot of time at Ten Chimneys deciding what to recommend to him. Boy, what a problem. The house and its contents had suffered the ravages of dust and sun and humidity. Just about everything was exactly where it had been. The letters from Olivier, Helen Hayes, Cole Porter, and other friends of "the celestial ones"—Porter's name for them—filled the drawers of French desks and built-in cabinets. There were playing cards and Kodak snapshots. Miss Fontanne's false eyelashes were still in her dressing table. Knick-knacks covered every surface. The Lunts were avid readers. Hundreds of books were lined up neatly on shelves in room after room. A glass dome could have been placed over it, of course. Curators would have loved it and have gained much meaning there. But largely only curators.

I ultimately recommended that Ten Chimneys be "repaired" and "conserved." Those two words became the major guiding forces. A small group of experts worked on the repair. The murals were cleaned and conserved. Upholsteries were saved where they could be. Substitutions were used in the few instances where original material could not be found. Wallpaper was cleaned and in one room replicated. Curtains sometimes were repaired and rehung. The finish of furniture was restored.

The whole project was done with an object-by-object approach according to what needed to be done. A thick manual of tasks was developed. We priced the work with people we wanted, rather than selecting consultants based on competitive bidding and specifications that might prove useless. Doing this sort of work on a lowest-bid basis is deadly. The Ten Chimneys interior was finished on time and well under budget.

Today, Ten Chimneys is a house museum. It interprets the Lunts' theatrical lives, for here their plays were rehearsed and this is where other stars came to visit them. Actors are somewhat like tent people; they generally do not keep

houses intact for long because they tend to move around. For the Lunts, Ten Chimneys was always home, despite their extensive travels. As completed, I am happy to say, it looks like it has been simply cleaned up, dusted, and polished—no more. This makes for a very happy ending.

Too often, a house restoration brings the whole contents of the house up to the level of taste and quality of the very finest things in it. Normally, houses are full of all kinds of things. Some may be fine, but others merely were comfortable or livable, without being the best.

One of the most notable examples of this effect in a historic house is Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon's contents are a combination of highs and lows and middle. Most restored historic houses do not exhibit this range.

Exhibiting a uniformly high level of taste and quality was the problem at Rosedown. In the 1960s, a New York decorating firm had restored it, using the very best of the original furnishings. Everything brought in was of that class or better. Inventories and actual photographs show that the house had both high end and ordinary furniture mingled together. In making a master plan recently, the challenge was to return that quality of mixture to the house.

I think that the visiting public appreciates most seeing a realistic vision of life as it was lived. This kind of restoration speaks to them, giving them the human setting. Many historic houses are overdone. They are filled with too much stuff. They house fancy relics. Often, the furniture dominates the story on the interior and drives the restoration. The result is the farmhouse gets to looking like a house in a fine urban neighborhood of today, instead of a remote agricultural establishment.

AJL: What is interpretive planning? Does it come first? Does the furnishings plan follow?

WS: Always. The most important material you work with is the history that the house will project. This includes the building too, and how we read it for facts. My interest is local history and its context—what people were concerned with at the time. All history is in a sense local history or a combination of local histories.

An interpretive plan is a book, really, that interprets the house in the context of being a house, a three-dimensional place where people lived. The plan provides the documentation for that. It also is an interpretation of the documents. Usually the interpretive plan and the furnishings plan are two separate documents.

AJL: Because an old house has evolved over time, it is a dilemma about whether or not it should focus on a single layer of its past.

WS: The interpretive plan forms the basis for the decision about what the story should be. I am not against taking a house back to a specific time or event in the past. You look for the most important, the most powerful interpretation. What does this property most clearly speak to historically? One of the most confusing approaches is having different rooms represent different periods. This results in a muddle with no confirmed image. Again, mainly curators are going to enjoy it.

AJL: Does the interpretive focus drive the rest of the project?

WS: How can it be otherwise and be historical?

AJL: Do you have a model for an interpretive plan and its contents?

WS: I have to think in terms of recent work. Rosedown might be viewed as a model. By 1960s standards, Rosedown was a good enough restoration, frothy to be sure. It was the home of Daniel and Martha Turnbull and was built in 1834-35, then expanded. The original plantation property covered 15,000 acres, of which nearly one-third was in cotton production. During that time, close to 500 slaves lived and worked on the various Turnbull plantations. After the Civil War, Rosedown's economic base collapsed with the emancipation of the enslaved workforce and Rosedown fell on hard times. The family held on, often tending the 35-acre garden themselves and changing the house very little.

By the time that the last of the grandchildren died in 1955, the house was an incredible document, falling into ruin. Mrs. Milton Underwood of Houston purchased and restored it out of an interest in the garden that had been begun about 1835. The ensuing restoration was especially important for the rescue of that garden. In its patterns and features you can trace the genesis from garden design books by Loudoun through Downing. Rosedown opened both the house and garden to the public in 1964. Nearly 40 years later, the State of Louisiana purchased the house, along with 360 acres, today it is known as Rosedown Plantation State Historic Site. When the State acquired Rosedown, it directed that the property be interpreted as an antebellum and Civil War period site. Thus, the interpretation focuses on the first three decades of Rosedown. None too soon, for something serious, because most other Louisiana landmark plantation houses have become jazzed up as B&Bs or tourist attractions.

My Rosedown is one of several reports, including archeological work on slave sites. The 2002 furnishings plan consists of several parts. The first section provides the historical narrative about the house and its occupants. This presents more history about Rosedown than was ever known. It is directed to the house. The historical narrative extends through the rediscovery of Rosedown in the 1920s when the automobile began to roll and tourists started to arrive.

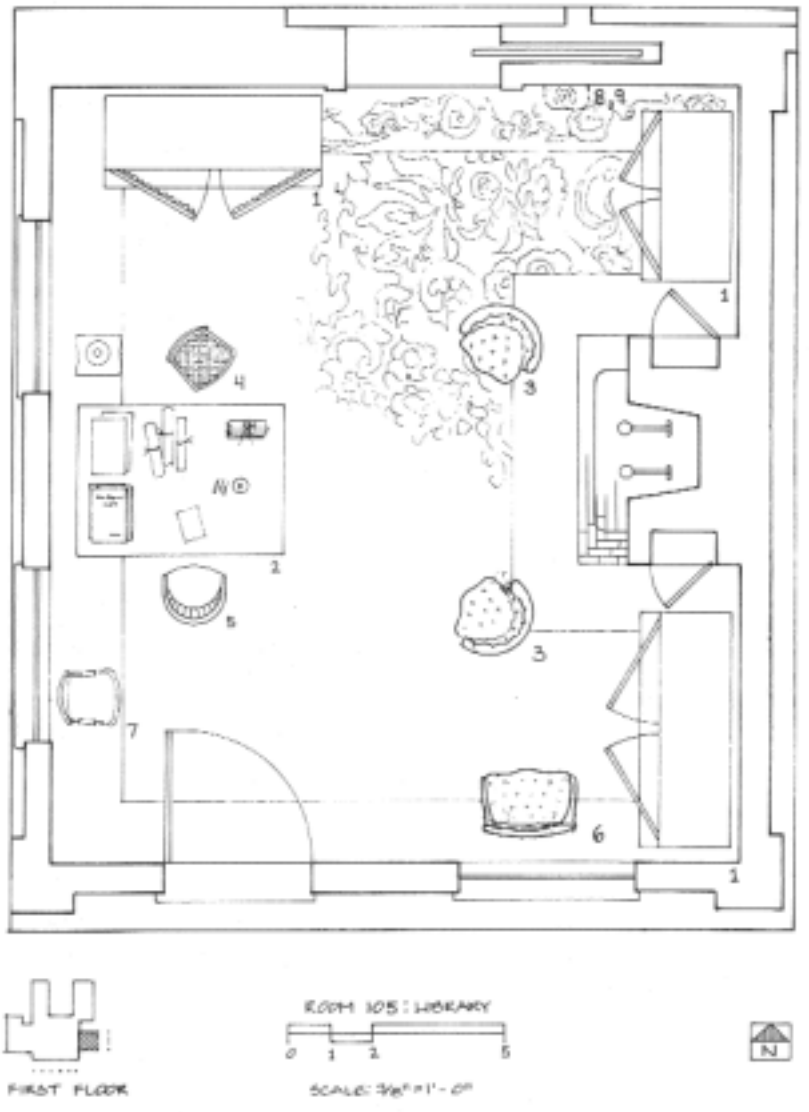

FIGURE 1
The floor plan of the library at Rosedown Plantation illustrates the setting that provides an opportunity to address the business side of Rosedown, including plantation lands and slavery. (Drawn by Suzanne Matty, courtesy of William Seale)

The narrative is followed by an interpretive strategy where the plan discusses how visitors will see the property; the major historical themes, such as the family, consumption patterns in goods, and the plantation economy. This section provides summaries of the architecture, garden, interiors, and furnishings; a bibliography; and copies of known historical photographs.

In the 1930s, photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston took pictures of Rosedown; a little afterwards Clarence John Laughlin did some very valuable coverage of the back of the house and the outbuildings, most radically altered in the 1960s.

The second part of the furnishings plan provides a detailed description or project for each room of the house, complete with drawings of floor plans, furniture, curtains, floor coverings, etc. The plan includes all sorts of details,

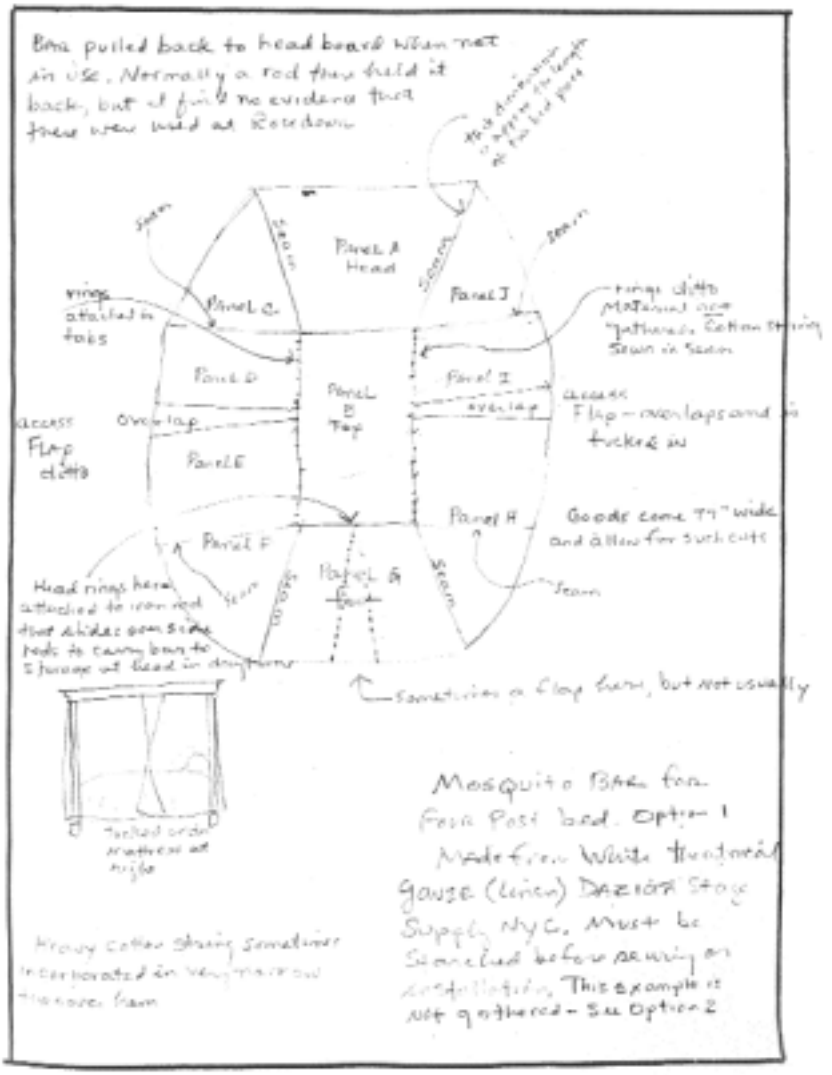

FIGURE 2
This pattern for a mosquito bar for a four-poster bed illustrates how residents at Rosedown Plantation protected themselves. (Courtesy of William Seale)

sketches of clothes that would have been worn by the various individuals, a pattern for mosquito bars for the beds, and items that would have been in the pantry. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

AJL: Given the substantial research that interpretive and furnishings plans require, how does your work relate to the history profession?

WS: Only in the use of the same techniques. My questioning is the same that the historian follows—with the addition of questioning of other kinds, such as physical remains, questions sometimes answered ultimately by logic. It takes a lot of contextual knowledge about houses or capitols or whatever to properly make such plans. You must read and read and travel and travel.

AJL: Do you regard historic houses as teaching instruments?

WS: Absolutely. Other reasons exist for historic houses, but my interest is in how they teach and provide a special forum. The best historic houses I know have a clear teaching mission and I don't mean something grabbed out of today's headlines. The best historic houses have well-informed docents who enjoy what they are doing and who are able to set up programs and become part of a learning and teaching process.

AJL: Do interpretive plans extend to what the interpreters use?

WS: Yes. The plan becomes the basis of what the property will say to the public. It contains just what it is called—the interpretation of the facts. The property's governing board accepts the interpretation as policy. Then everyone knows what page they are on. The furnishings serve the interpretive plan. An interpretive plan is substantial; I have seen them one or two pages long but these are not serious interpretive plans. An interpretive plan also begins or sets the direction for further research, one hopes.

AJL: Will there be new trends in history that will cause the updating of interpretive plans decades from now?

WS: Well, history being what we make of facts, points of view and areas of interest do change. If the core subject matter has been well-honed, and if the building is true, I would not think that there would be a change until a new perspective presented itself. Sometimes the issue *is* simply perspective. Take Rosedown, for example, and its challenges. The great garden was the creation of the slaves and the Turnbulls. Generations of African Americans worked in it and we know many of their names and the character of their work. It had never been seen from that viewpoint before. But today it can be without physical change. Many of today's interpretive plans provide a firm foundation for nuances in the approach. But to say a historic house will never be reinterpreted is not accurate. It is like saying some book will be the last biography of someone.

By 2050, new theories and technologies may evolve. I feel that old buildings will become more valuable with time—pure, well-preserved early buildings from the past, as well as others that time has been kind to. Technology will improve so that restoring them will not be as complicated. That is already happening. We have an awful lot of historic house museums today. I may have seen most of them. Typically, they have really bad historical underpinnings. They've been compromised in the accommodation of all sorts of machines, usually for comfort. They are not fooling the public with their weak interpretation and usually suffer for this shortcoming. People get bored with dollhouses.

AJL: Dealing with public buildings lies somewhere between the historic house and the privately owned property. Public buildings are usually workplaces. No one lives there.

WS: A restored public building like a capitol should reflect a serious attempt to be authentic to the building, with the understanding that the rooms are used hard for modern purposes. Concepts for this come from an intellectual interaction between architects and historians who collaborate on a concept and carry it through design. On that basis, when the restoration is finished, the buildings are not trashed. A sensible attitude is developed toward the restoration of a public building when it is done that way. As examples, I can point to the capitols of Michigan and Ohio where harmony unites the buildings and their interiors.

AJL: Is a governor's mansion somewhere between a restored public building and a privately owned building?

WS: It is more like a public building, even though someone lives there. Very few were built to be open to the public. They are usually simply big houses. Since the White House refurbishment under President Kennedy, they are usually open to the public, with the demands that entails. The family crowds upstairs and the downstairs rooms are public. Very few mansions can support this comfortably, but all try. Most governors' domestic households are stuffed into a relatively small upstairs, in space meant to be only bedrooms.

AJL: Some young people ask the question, "Why study history?"

WS: History teaches perspective. Goodness knows, in the avalanche of words that rush over us now from the printed page and television, perspective is important. Now and then you just have to say, "I don't believe that," or dismiss it because it is obviously slanted, illogical, or not true or just glitz. A lot of what comes from the age of information is worthless. You've got to be able to judge to live in a free society. History helps with your thinking. And three-dimensional history, houses, etc., help with that all-important and life-enriching historical imagination.

Students can't expect to get it all in school. While school is usually basic and a convenient forum, I guess, and simplifies things, the real delight of history is finding out something for yourself. One does not have to be an academic. Most great historians were amateurs. For those who love history, the spark never cools.

AJL: What do you advise those who wish to have a career like yours?

WS: I am not sure how many people could have a career similar to mine. Is anyone else as obsessed with the subject as I am? I have been interested in this since I was maybe 10 years old. It is not something you can just drop into. It is not a 9-to-5 job. That's why I am free-lance and have been for 26 years.

I am a believer in traditional general academic training. Some majors today are risky as to their enduring value. It is not enough to just learn about furniture. You need to learn social history, politics, and biography. In closer focus, you study buildings, the uses of buildings, conveniences, how people lived, and what they thought was comfortable. You need to absorb manuscript sources, not just read other people's work—although you have to do that too. With restoration, experience, of course, is priceless and not easy to come by. Experiencing old buildings is essential—you learn so many important little things that you need to know, like the fact that carpets in 1840 had less to do with looks than with keeping the cold air out. Such a tiny fact as that, you know, can influence the appearance of an entire room.

As for having a career like mine, you have to love buildings for reasons other than because they are attractive. They have to say something to you. When the dialog begins, the work begins. I have considered having interns and have had a few, but it is a teaching job. I am a one-man band with a group of colleagues (also one-man or one-woman bands) that I pull together for projects. It makes the maximum use of my time. I can still write and those two things are all I do anyway. So someone else will have to create a studio to train others.